



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

EDITORS: Please consider for use in letters or op-ed pages.

Booster seat enhancement bill needed for greater child safety

HB 282 would bring Kentucky in line with 31 other states, all neighboring states

By Mike Hancock

**Secretary, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and
Governor's Representative for Highway Safety**

and

Bill Bell

Director, Kentucky Office of Highway Safety

Car crashes are the No. 1 killer of children 1 to 12 years old in the United States. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the best way to protect them in the car is to put them in the right seat, at the right time, and use it the right way.

That is why it is critically important that the Kentucky General Assembly enact House Bill 282, the Booster Seat enhancement bill that is a key piece of Governor Steve Beshear's legislative initiatives for greater safety and protection of our most precious asset – our children.

Enactment of HB 282 would bring Kentucky in line with in 31 other states, including all seven of our neighboring states, which require that children, once having outgrown harnessed child passenger seats, continue to use belted booster seats until they are 9 years old or 4 feet, 9 inches tall (57 inches).

The reason is simple: Motor vehicle seat belts were designed for adults, not children. But the added height of the booster seat enables the child to fit into a seat belt properly.

Consider the case of an 8-year-old of typical height– 49 inches. Envision that child buckled into a standard seat belt without benefit of a booster seat. By virtue of being 8 years old, the child is legally restrained in Kentucky. But is he or she safely restrained?

Chances are that the shoulder belt is on the child's neck rather than the collar bone. The lap belt is up on the abdomen rather than over the lap and pelvis. According to Kosair Children's Hospital, the ill-fitting lap belt puts the child at significantly greater risk of serious injury to the liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys and intestines in the event of a crash. The ill-fitting shoulder belt puts the child at much higher risk of a serious head or facial injury.

The following information from Kosair, drawn from 142 trauma cases involving children in motor vehicle crashes, was presented recently to the House Transportation Committee in Frankfort:

- All were restrained in seat belts.
- 70 percent were older than 7 and younger than 10 – so a booster seat was not required.
- All had injuries to internal organs.
- Half the children had head or face injuries, of which 30 percent were severe.
- 1 in 5 had large-bone leg fractures.
- One child had a traumatic amputation consistent with having a belt that was not snug.

Thanks to research by NHTSA and the American Academy of Pediatrics, we now know that our legal standard is not a sufficiently safe standard.

Our emphasis needs to be on what is safe, not merely what is legal.

HB 282 has been passed by the Kentucky House and now awaits action in the Kentucky Senate.

Over the years, Kentucky has taken important steps aimed at improving the safety of children in passenger vehicles. In 1982, the General Assembly passed legislation that for the first time required the use of child passenger seats, and in 1988 attached penalties for noncompliance.

The General Assembly followed up in 2008 with enactment of our current law, which requires use of booster seats for children under age 7 and between 40 and 50 inches in height.

HB282 is not complicated legislation. If enacted, the booster seat already being used by a 6-year-old would continue in use until the child turned 9.

We applaud the Kentucky House for having passed HB 282. We strongly encourage and eagerly await passage in the Kentucky Senate.

EDITORS: This was co-signed or endorsed by Dr. Stephen P. Wright, medical director, Kosair Children's Hospital, and professor, University of Louisville School of Medicine; Mary York, executive director, Kentucky Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Dr. Ryan A. Stanton, president, Kentucky Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians; Commissioner Rodney Brewer, Kentucky State Police; Stan Lampe, president, Kentuckians for Better Transportation; Louisville Metro Police Chief Steve Conrad; Terry Brooks, executive director, Kentucky Youth Advocates; Jason Gabbard, assistant vice president, The Allen Company; Wells Fargo Insurance Services; Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police; Marshall County Health Department; Pike County Health Department; Madison County Health Department; Chell Austin, executive director, Brain Injury Alliance of Kentucky.